MEANINGS, POLITICS AND REALITIES OF SOCIAL MIX AND GENTRIFICATION – A VIEW FROM BRUSSELS

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INTRODUCTION

That the spread of neoliberalism around the globe over the last three decades has been responsible for mounting social inequalities within and across national boundaries is now a matter of fact (see e.g. Landais, 2007; ILO, 2008; OECD, 2008). How this trend translates in changing urban socio-spatial configurations should be a basic underlying issue in any discussion of the meanings, politics and realities of 'social mix' in cities. Yet, in Brussels just as in many other cities, mainstream debates on social mix(ing) appear largely dissociated from any considerations of increasing social or spatial inequalities. The bulk of policy and media narratives tend rather to naturalize the desirability of social mix as prime policy goal at whatever scale, hence depriving the notion of any proper political dimension and further inserting debates on urban development in the realm of the 'post-political' (Swyngedouw, 2008).

Looking at the Brussels' case, social mix appears today as an undisputed policy *ideal*. As the *Plan Régional de Développement* (Regional Development Plan – i.e. the city's main master plan) puts it :

"Contrary to the American city, the ideal type for the European city is based on a mix of functions and people. This ideal has to be found in a city that is able to regenerate itself and to create an added value by comparison with what the suburbs have to offer" (Government of the Brussels Capital Region, 2002: 9 – our translation).

However, the profusion of policy and media narratives unambiguously putting forward the desirability of social mix(ing) offers a general sense of social romanticism, for these discourses appears at odds with the harsh realities of a 'divided city' wherein the distribution of wealth among social classes is highly uneven – and increasingly so (Kesteloot, 2000; Loopmans & Kesteloot, 2009). Today, 26% of the Brussels' inhabitants live at risk of poverty (compared to 15% in Belgium)ⁱ, despite the fact that the city ranks among the wealthiest European agglomeration in term of GDP per capita (Observatoire de la Santé et du Social, 2008). Moreover, about 50% of the total taxable income is earned by the wealthiest 20% of the city's population, whereas inhabitants in the lower quintile earn less than 5% of this total; this gap has been widening since the early 1980sⁱⁱ. These social inequalities translate in sharp spatial contrasts at the intra-urban scale. Significantly enough, the difference in life

expectancy at birth between the city's poorest and wealthiest municipalities is today as high as 5.7 years for women and 6.2 years for men. In such context, there is an urgent need to think beyond mainstream representations of social mix as an unquestionable urban policy priority – rather than the fight against socio-spatial inequities.

This chapter is in two main parts. First, we will tackle the proper political dimension of social mix narratives in Brussels by shedding some light on the politics behind the emergence of this notion as an undisputed policy ideal. Moving a little back in the local history of urban governance shows that the present-day broad consensus among city's political elites about social mix reflects the increasing political power of the local, urban-oriented middle classes since the late 1980s. Accordingly, the notion of social mix is intensively used in reference to a policy orientation laying emphasis on fostering a 'back-to-the-city' (or 'stay-in-the-city') movement by local middle-class households. In addition, looking at the latest developments in urban governance and planning frameworks highlights that the meaning attached to the notion of social mix can significantly change when the composition or political agenda of the elite coalition in power – or the type of urban regime – evolves. The adoption in December 2007 of the 'International Development Plan for Brussels' shows such a rearticulation of the strategic meaning associated with the 'social mix' notion. This rearticulation appears in line with the rise of a fully-fledged neoliberal glocal growth coalition eager to capitalize on Brussels' image as imagined 'Capital of Europe'.

Our second aim in this chapter is to confront existing normative policy discourses promoting the reinvestment of inner working-class neighbourhoods by middle-class households in the name of an enhanced social mix with views on the actual processes reshaping Brussels' social geographies at the neighbourhood scale. Here, empirical findings derived from analysis of intra-metropolitan population migration dynamics suggest that the advance of state-sponsored gentrification in the central city goes hand in hand with increasing socio-spatial inequalities at the city scale – rather than increasing social mixing of population groups.

I. SOCIAL MIX AS POLICY IDEAL IN BRUSSELS

I.1 The rise of an urban revitalisation policy framework

The premise of social mix acts as core value of the currently hegemonic vision of urban development in Brussels (Shaton, 2005; Baillergeau, 2008). It is not before the early 1990s, however, that an ideal-type of a socially – and functionally – mixed city has been formalised in regulatory and strategic planning frameworks at the national (i.e. city) scale, and further translated into various 'urban revitalisation' programmes focussing on inner working-class neighbourhoods. These programmes notably include the provision of renovation grants and tax cuts to homebuyers in these neighbourhoods, the sale of public-owned land at below market rates to private developers in order for them to build new middle-class housing schemes, and a variety of interventions on public spaces involving both beautification and surveillance measures (e.g. redesigning sidewalks, installing new street lighting, furniture and CCTV systems, hiring of urban stewards and park keepers, organising festive events, etc.) (Dessouroux *et al.*, 2009). All these actions share a strong desire to 'open up' inner-city neighbourhoods that were long kept out of the mental maps of the middle classes (Vandermotten 1994; Kesteloot & Mistiaen, 1998; Van Crielingen 2009).

Looking back at dominant planning frameworks and policy orientations in post-WWII decades returns a very different picture. Urban development strategies for Brussels were then primarily designed by national policy-makers in the Belgian government. The main focus was on the reinforcement of the city's role as national capital and major place of transnational political centrality. This priority implied favouring the concentration in Brussels' core city of national administrations, international political bodies (the European Union first of all, since 1958) and whatever service functions linked to the EU presence (e.g. cities' and regions' representation offices, law and consultancy firms, lobbies, NGOs, etc.). Moreover, middle-class households were strongly encouraged to settle down in suburban residential areas and commute daily by car or train. These options have notably led to the development of a large office market in the core cityⁱⁱⁱ, intense middle-class suburbanisation, and the displacement of numerous inhabitants, generally working-class and migrant households, from areas designated for redevelopment into office districts (e.g. 15,000 people forced out of the Quartier Nord in the 1960s and 1970s – Vanden Eede and Martens, 1994). Unlike in neighbouring countries, however, the Belgian post-war model of urban development has not included the production

of a significant stock of public-owned housing units. In Brussels, social housing units account today for a little 8% of the housing stock, and the production of new social housing units has dropped to extremely low levels since 2000 (28 units/year over the period 2000-2005 – adapted from Zimmer 2007), whereas 35,000 households are formally registered on waiting lists.

This model of urban development was backed by powerful coalitions of national and municipal politicians, and real estate developers. It was very much in line with the anti-urban values of the catholic-conservative bourgeoisie dominating then national governmental coalitions (Kesteloot & De Maesschalck, 2001). On the other hand, it was seriously harmful to the city's inhabitants, both the local middle class attached to central city living and – even more drastically – working-class households whose neighbourhoods were directly threatened with disinvestment or destruction. The former category played a key instrumental role in the emergence, from the late 1960s, of an anti-modernist urban social movement pushing forward a Jane Jacobs-like counter-model of urban rehabilitation, soon theorized as the 'Reconstruction of the European City' and backed by a myriad of local action groups campaigning against the destruction of the urban habitat (Aron, 1978).

Although this counter-model has gained some political audience during the 1970s and 1980s (notably regarding the consultation of the local population affected by infrastructure projects), it is not before the institutionalisation of a new regional scale of governance in 1989– i.e. the Brussels Capital Region –, in the wake of the (still ongoing) federalisation of the Belgian state, that this advocacy of the rehabilitation of inner-city neighbourhoods has been transcribed into an urban project backed by significant political and institutional power. Put shortly, the creation of the Brussels Capital Region has meant a re-scaling of the urban regime, with planning options now being defined by regional political elites elected by the city's inhabitants. Owing to this political re-scaling, the former counter-model of urban rehabilitation changed status, that is, it moved from opposition to power at the regional level.

Today, this model underpins a hegemonic 'urban revitalisation' policy framework set up in the early 1990s by the then newly elected first cohort of regional political elites. This policy framework rests on a broad range of programmes ultimately focusing on the enhancement of the quality of life in the city. First of all, 'revitalising' the city intends at altering the territorial imprints of the post-war urban development model which has established suburban

municipalities as privileged residential environment for middle-class families (Vandermotten, 1994; Kesteloot, 2000)^{iv}. Bringing middle-class households into central neighbourhoods is considered the best way to solve the 'urban crisis', the prime cause of the latter being attributed to the middle-class suburbanisation :

"The abandonment of these neighbourhoods results from ... the fact that Brussels has lost its capacity to attract and settle inhabitants in the inner city, for upward social mobility has meant for many the opportunity to live in the suburbs" (introduction to the Revitalisation of Old Neighbourhoods Act, Council of the Brussels Capital Region, 1992 – our translation).

Accordingly, middle-class home-owning families are regarded in mainstream policy narratives as the sole true 'saviours' of the Brussels' regional institutions, simultaneously swelling the ranks of solvent taxpayers^v, housing renovators, stable voters and 'decent' citizens deemed able to instil a new dose of social control in impoverished working-class and migrant inner neighbourhoods (see also Baeten, 2001a). For instance, this inclination is quite clearly expressed in the presentation of the rationale commanding the subsidiation by the Federal and Regional governments of the building of a new housing scheme in the neighbourhood next to Brussels' South Station:

"The production of the first housing units for middle-income groups would play an important role as 'starter' of the stimulation of this key neighbourhood alongside the country's biggest railways station. ... Keeping [social and functional] mix at a reasonable level ... implies that housing for middle-income populations would not be forgotten. Unfortunately, the current sociological profile [i.e. working-class and migrant] of the neighbourhood and the still high land prices make this project difficult, if not impossible, unless public money is injected into it. Public money will be recovered on the long run thanks to the enhancement of the tax base associated with the attraction of new inhabitants into the neighbourhood, as well as with the attraction of new retail businesses and services which usually come with these new inhabitants" (Federal State and Brussels Capital Region, 'Beliris' Agreement, Annex 8, February 2003 – our translation).

This is a quite explicit formulation of a state-sponsored gentrification strategy – or gentrification policy (Lees & Ley, 2008; Rousseau, 2008), and the promotion of social mix is given an indisputable priority in it. However, the notion is associated here with a limited, one-

directional meaning. The Belgium's Court of Audit clearly emphasizes this point in a recent assessment of policy programmes dedicated to 'neighbourhoods in crisis' in Brussels and nine other Belgian cities^{vi}:

"The promotion of social mixing is found in many programmes. ... The notion of social mix is a very vague one. ... Most often, however, it is about attracting middle-class households in impoverished neighbourhoods in order to create a social mix (it is rarely about promoting social mix in more affluent neighbourhoods)" (Court of Audit, 2007: 47 – our translation).

The social mix argument is indeed very rarely used in view of the opening up of the established bourgeois neighbourhoods to working-class households. However, in cities of advanced capitalist countries, the general level of social specialization of residential spaces is generally highest in long-standing bourgeois neighbourhoods (see e.g. Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, 1989, 2007), and Brussels makes no exception in this regard (Debroux *et al.*, 2008). In addition, the limited meaning attached to the notion of social mix also translates into the definition of the privileged instruments dedicated to achieve the desired 'revitalisation' of impoverished neighbourhoods. There is a general imbalance here between a very strong emphasis put on encouraging *spatial* mobility of new (i.e. middle-class) inhabitants towards inner neighbourhoods (*via* renovation grants, tax cuts for homebuyers, production of new housing units, physical rehabilitation and animation of public spaces,...) *versus* a weaker emphasis put on promoting upward *social* mobility of inner neighbourhoods' incumbent residents. Rather, social policies focused on incumbent populations in working-class neighbourhoods, albeit providing some highly welcome social benefits (e.g. remedial teaching, training courses, etc.), show a strong bias towards social control and surveillance of groups regarded as potentially troublesome, in view of a 'pacification' of these neighbourhoods (Réa, 2007). Finally, these social measures do not affect mechanisms of inflating rent levels and housing prices, hence leaving low-income incumbent residents at risk of forced relocation in case parallel revitalisation policies are actually successful in making the neighbourhood more attractive for wealthier newcomers.

I.2 Social mix as urban asset for the imagined 'Capital of Europe'

In December 2007, a new strategic planning document has been adopted by the Brussels' regional government, named '*International Development Plan for Brussels*' (IDP)^{vii}. In contrast to the vision of an urban revitalisation centred upon the local middle classes, the IDP focuses on the attraction of international investors, foreign visitors, tourists or conference delegates, and whatever extra-local clienteles of consumers and (temporary or permanent) residents. The document's chief planning option amounts to the opening up of the remaining large pieces of vacant land located on the territory of the Brussels Capital Region for speculative real estate development projects (e.g. a football arena, a concert hall, a shopping centre, a congress centre, an exhibition hall, etc.). Moreover, the document also advocates the development of new office schemes and middle- to upper-class housing projects, notably in the EU district, as well as the construction of a EU-related landmark cultural centre which could act as a symbol of the city's international scope. These developments are thought to be conducted by public-private partnerships, and framed by *ad hoc* planning procedures (e.g. speeding-up the procedures for granting building permits). Accordingly, the IDP builds upon a clear entrepreneurial rationale (Harvey, 1989): what is here at stake is the position of Brussels in the inter-urban competition for the attraction of mobile capital, beyond the city's already well-established position as political world city.

The IDP is backed by economic elites pushing neoliberal agendas – that is, supporting strategies '[dedicated to] *resuscitate cities a sites for capital accumulation*' (Wilson 2004: 771), among which real estate businesses (i.e. developers, investors, consultants) and federations of enterprises are predominant. In this sense, the recent adoption of the IDP points to the emergence since the early 2000s of a new glocal growth coalition, that is, an alliance between regional political elites eager to put forward Brussels' image as imagined 'Capital of Europe' and transnationalised economic elites operating in (or from) Brussels (Van Criekingen & Decroly, 2009 – compare Swyngedouw and Moyersoen [2006] commenting on the absence of such glocal growth coalition in the city *before* the realisation of the IDP). Significantly enough, the IDP has been first presented to a panel of real estate and business leaders, and only afterwards to the regional parliament. By contrast, community groups traditionally advocating the middle-class urban revitalisation agenda have been consciously kept out of the elaboration of the plan. Furthermore, not any single public debate nor open

discussion session dedicated to the general public has been held before or since the adoption of the IDP.

This new strategic planning document expresses a substantial re-conceptualisation of the meaning attached to the social mix notion. In substance, social mix is considered in the IDP one of the city's key asset, and one that should be insistently marketed towards extra-local clienteles of residents, investors, tourists and visitors. New city branding strategies articulated around the promotion of Brussels as a 'socially mixed' city – as well as a 'multicultural', 'cosmopolitan', and 'easy-to-live' one – are considered in the IDP as keys to alter common perceptions of Brussels as just the centre of EU bureaucracy, and foster instead new perceptions of a favoured place to live in, to visit and to consume in. Moreover, this new narrative of social mix goes hand in hand with a dramatic deepening of the option to open up inner working-class neighbourhoods to wealthier (local or extra-local) newcomers. The report used by the Brussels' regional government as basis for the redaction of the IDP is particularly unambiguous in this respect:

"[the plan advocates to] *develop a city marketing strategy at the neighbourhood scale ... notably for the most impoverished neighbourhoods, in order to increase their value as well as to prevent their negative image from transcending their boundaries and harming the international image of the city ('Bronx' effect) ... Social mix must be a main thread of urban development in Brussels. One must enforce both out-going flows from priority zones [i.e. inner working-class neighbourhoods] in order to avoid the concentration of poverty in social ghettos, and in-going flows into these zones by stimulating the installation of middle-class populations*" (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2007: 72-3 – our translation)^{viii}.

One could hardly find a more explicit, state-sponsored call for gentrification *and displacement* ! This is also a rather violent expression of Neil Smith's (1996) revanchist urbanism thesis, for social mix is thought here to act *for* some (i.e. in-coming flows of middle-class newcomers) as well as *against* others (i.e. out-going flows of incumbent residents). Put another way, promoting social mix is here simultaneously about attracting desired newcomers and excluding the undesirable locals, the latter deemed responsible for the negative image (i.e. 'Bronx') of the inner city. Eventually, this should however not obscure the intrinsic non-sense of the claim made here by the IDP promoters, for it is obviously

impossible to get any mix of population groups if one argues for moving the incumbent ones out while simultaneously arguing for bringing others in.

To summarize, the recent introduction of the International Development Plan shows that what is meant by social mix can change as the composition and political agenda of dominant elite coalitions evolves. There is an articulation between the type of elite coalition in power – i.e. the type of urban regime –, the kind of urban development agenda these protagonists push forward, and the meaning attached to the notion of social mix. Once only used in reference to a (still vivid) policy orientation laying emphasis on fostering a 'back-to-the-city' (or 'stay-in-the-city') movement by local middle-class households, the notion of social mix is now also integrated as a core element of new city branding strategies, in line with the rise of a glocal growth coalition eager to capitalize on Brussels' image as imagined 'Capital of Europe'.

II. SOCIAL MIX IN DISCOURSES, GENTRIFICATION IN PRACTICE?

The above-mentioned report by the Belgium's Court of Audit also states that:

"It is likely that the lowest categories of wage-earners which have the most severe difficulties to find a place to live will not benefit from the housing projects. Social mix is a goal put forward in many projects. In practice, it is often about attracting middle-class households in order to get a social mix. Within the framework of policies dedicated to impoverished neighbourhoods, one must take negative impacts into consideration. Rising prices can lead to the displacement of low-income people from these neighbourhoods. At the moment, such impacts are not taken into account" (Court of Audit, 2007: 4 – our translation).

Later on, the report even asserts that:

"... within the framework of policies targeting impoverished groups, one must seriously take into consideration the negative effects of gentrification" (Court of Audit, 2007: 47 – our translation)^{ix}.

As indicated by these quotes, this report makes a clear link between urban revitalisation policies framed in social mix narratives, the advance of gentrification processes, and related displacement effects – in Brussels and other Belgian cities. In what follows, we intend to further build on this crucial articulation. After a presentation of the place-specific context in which gentrification processes are embedded in the Brussels' case, we comment on previous empirical analyses (Van Criekingen, 2008, 2009) dedicated to test whether gentrification-induced displacement processes fuelling broader patterns of increasing socio-spatial fragmentation could be identified at the city scale, using data on migrations to and from inner neighbourhoods.

2.1 Brussels: gentrification in context

In a city like Brussels, housing market mechanisms play an essential role in the remodelling of neighbourhoods' social geographies. The Brussels housing market has appreciably tightened up from the mid-1980s, showing a major increase of property values on both the homeowner market and the private rental market, far above the inflation rate (Zimmer, 2007; Bernard et al., 2009). About 50% of households in the city rent their home from private landlords – this proportion reaches two-third in inner neighbourhoods, and the public housing sector is only residual. Accordingly, a majority of low-income households are accommodated as tenants of private landlords, typically in 19th-century houses divided up in multiple apartments offering poor-quality housing units. These households are highly vulnerable vis-à-vis escalating rent levels, since effective regulations on rent levels are lacking. How the new rent is worked out once a tenant leaves and a new lease is concluded is almost entirely left to the play of market forces through individualised negotiations between landlords and potential renters. Moreover, private landlords have ample possibilities for ending a lease before its term (e.g. for self-occupation purposes or for the implementation of substantial renovation work) (De Decker 2001; Bernard, 2004). In this context, rising housing costs are now responsible for *in situ* deterioration of living conditions, for renters striving not to leave their neighbourhood have to devote a growing share of their earnings to paying the rent and therefore cut in other budget items (education, healthcare, leisure,...). Figures for 2006 indicate that 54% of renters in Brussels spend from 41% to 65% of their household budget on housing, while 25% is commonly seen as the admissible limit (Bernard et al., 2009).

The continuing internationalisation of Brussels has indisputably given housing market appreciation a major boost, as many landlords, homeowners and real-estate investors intend to cash in on the influx of an expanding clientele of expatriate professionals working for the European Union and other transnational public or private organisations. Nevertheless, this 'Europeanization' of the city (Baeten, 2001b) has not (yet) been paralleled by a massive colonization of working-class inner neighbourhoods by high-income expatriate households. Rather, most white-collar expatriates who opt for a residence in the core city favour long-established pericentral bourgeois neighbourhoods, hence further adding to the elite character of these neighbourhoods (Van Criekingen & Decroly, 2003; Cailliez, 2004; see also Préteceille, 2007 on Paris). In parallel, white-collar expatriates who opt for more central locations, in or close to working-class areas, often end up in upmarket, secured residential schemes, including new-build premises and loft conversion projects in the historic core.

There is also ample evidence of central working-class neighbourhoods being recast in the mould of in-moving (lower) middle-class newcomers. The latter are mostly educated young adults (i.e. between 25 and 34), living alone or in childless couples in apartments rented from private landlords. Survey suggest that, for many among them, a presence in the inner city is associated with a pleasant yet transitional step in their residential career during which socially and culturally diversified inner-urban environments are strongly valued (Leloup, 2002). Accordingly, these households show generally high residential mobility rates. This implies a rapid turnover on the private rental market that acts in turn as a catalyst for rising rent levels, for it is quite practical for landlords to upgrade the pricing and characteristics of their properties in order to meet educated young adults' rising demand for non-luxury, yet comfortable rental units in the central city. This fuels a process of rental gentrification, that is, a trajectory of upward neighbourhood change basically associated with the reinvestment of the existing private rental market (Van Criekingen, 2010). This makes thus a notable difference with more classical stories of gentrification, whose key protagonists are affluent homebuyers in the inner city (Lees *et al.*, 2007). In this context, the position of low-income households in the inner city is severely jeopardized even in the absence of any significant transfer of private rental units to owner occupation.

These housing market pressures, combined with changes in the local supply of retail and services framing expanding landscapes of 'trendy' consumption (Van Criekingen & Fleury, 2006) and a general policy prioritization of the attraction of middle-class newcomers to inner

neighbourhoods, eventually affects incumbent residents in working-class neighbourhoods various ways. Beyond direct considerations of mounting housing cost, displacement pressures also result from the dislocation of locally-embedded social networks or the exacerbation of feelings of loss of a familiar sense of place. It is not surprising, in this context, that local community organisations in Brussels' inner neighbourhoods have now many personal stories of deteriorating housing conditions and displacement to relate (Béghin, 2006; Brussels Alliance for the Right to Housing, 2007). This strongly suggests that the current round of state-sponsored reinvestment in Brussels' inner neighbourhoods creates winners and losers, leaving the latter with few other options than staying put at the cost of deteriorating housing and living conditions, or moving away under constraint.

II.2 Lessons from the study of intra-metropolitan residential mobility patterns

In a city like Brussels, empirical explorations of population migration dynamics directed towards or originating from inner neighbourhoods offers a relevant way to gain insights into the socio-spatial impacts of gentrification against which narratives advocating the revitalisation and enhanced social mixing of these neighbourhoods could be ultimately confronted (see Van Criekingen, 2008, 2009 for details on datasets and methodologies).

Quite unsurprisingly, multiple residential mobility patterns of different nature are conflated in the set of migrants moving in or out of Brussels' gentrifying neighbourhoods. Educated young adults in non-family households, mostly tenants in the private rental sector compose a prominent group among both in- and out-migrants to or from these neighbourhoods. Their residential trajectories are heavily focused on the densely built-up urban environment, that is, they move between different Brussels' central neighbourhoods or between the latter and central areas in other urban agglomerations in the country – like e.g. Ghent, Antwerp, Liège or Leuven. The prominence of this profile of migrants points to the above-mentioned rental gentrification dynamic associated with middle-class young adults generally opting for gentrifying inner neighbourhoods as temporary holding areas in their housing career.

Empirical treatments dedicated to trace the residential trajectory of out-movers from Brussels' gentrifying neighbourhoods also stress the permanence of a significant pattern of middle-class suburbanisation, involving higher-educated, family households with young children moving

towards suburban areas, often remote ones. More importantly, however, findings derived from these treatments highlight a sizeable mobility pattern associated with low-status migrants – i.e. less-educated individuals, unemployed persons and workers – directed toward working-class and ethnic neighbourhoods in Brussels' western inner city or, to a lesser extent, beyond the city limits, either toward working-class municipalities in the suburbs or toward Wallonia's old industrial urban agglomerations. A large stock of old workmen's houses accounts for much lower housing prices in these municipalities severely hit by deindustrialisation in the past decades. These findings suggest therefore that a sizeable share of the migrants moving out of Brussels' gentrifying inner neighbourhoods are poorly-resourced individuals moving towards economically depressed areas, within the city or beyond. However, the quantitative datasets providing the basic material for these empirical analyses do not enable us to conclude straightforwardly that these low-status migrants were forced out of their initial location because of the advance of gentrification. Rather, these findings indicate where the household types most vulnerable to gentrification-induced displacement pressures are most likely to relocate. In this sense, it is suggested here that most of the potential displacees are restricted to short-distance moves within the city, primarily directed towards impoverished working-class neighbourhoods in the western inner city, while some others move over longer distances and leave the city as a whole (Van Criekingen, 2008).

Eventually, these findings corroborate existing views on the mounting concentration of socially vulnerable groups in working-class and ethnic neighbourhoods through intra-urban migration. Earlier works on Brussels have empirically detailed such patterns of relocation of poorly-resourced population groups (including e.g. unemployed persons, low-qualified workers, migrant households from North-African or Turkish origin) from gentrifying areas in the historic core and the eastern inner city towards impoverished working-class neighbourhoods in the western inner city (Kesteloot & De Decker, 1992; De Lannoy & De Corte, 1994; Van Criekingen, 2002). Furthermore, empirical findings also support appraisals by local community organisations (such as tenants unions and neighbourhood associations) stressing that part of the urban poor are now being 'exported' from Brussels' inner neighbourhoods towards other, generally depressed areas in the rest of the country, hence putting even more load on supportive services in destination areas.

In sum, exploring the migration dynamics associated with gentrification in Brussels brings out a pattern of rising socio-spatial fragmentation, both at the intra-urban scale (i.e. between gentrifying neighbourhoods in the historic core or the eastern inner city, and further impoverishing working-class and migrant neighbourhoods in the western inner city) and at the inter-urban scale (i.e. between Brussels' gentrifying core part, and working-class suburban municipalities or the country's old industrial agglomerations). Therefore, once looking beyond the limits of 'revitalised' inner neighbourhoods, one is confronted with evidence of rising socio-spatial inequality at the city scale – and even beyond – rather than with views of increasing social mixing.

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CONCLUSION

"Social mix per se is neither good nor bad, just as working-class or migrant ghettos per se are neither good nor bad. One can argue a long time about the respective values of social mix and ghettos; one can praise the benefits of mixing social groups or on the contrary emphasize the risks of dispersal and division among working classes brought about by social mixing; one can highlight forms of neighbourhood solidarity in ghettos and even bring out the capacity of ghettos to act as centres of resistance or on the contrary insist on the problems created by housing overcrowding – but whatever the centre of the debate, a basic issue is left out: who takes part in this debate? Who decides?" (Tevanian & Tissot, 2010, p.196 – our translation).

In their insightful critique of French urban policy and dominant representations of the *quartiers sensibles*, P. Tevanian and S. Tissot vividly highlight the proper political dimension of contemporary policy narratives articulated around a social mix(ing) imperative. In this chapter, we have tried to shed some light on this issue in Brussels. Here, just as in many other places, and despite specificities in local social geographies or models of urban governance, social mix(ing) policy narratives refer to one-directional calls to open up working-class neighbourhoods to middle-class newcomers – either locals or extra-local clienteles to lure in the city. Tackling the political dimension of recurrent calls for social mix implies thus to bring

to the fore underlying policy visions that see the middle classes as the only true 'saviours' of the city.

Opposing the advance of gentrification and related increase of socio-spatial inequalities first requires to radically reconsider such policy visions. One key implication for policy-makers would then be to give priority to the promotion of upward *social* mobility of incumbent population in working-class neighbourhoods, rather than to the promotion of the *spatial* mobility of middle-class newcomers – that is, fighting poverty, discrimination and social insecurity rather than moving the poor.

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ⁱ This means living with less than 860€/month for a one-person household, or with less than 1,805€/month for a household with 2 adults and 2 dependent children.

ⁱⁱ Source: FPS Economy - Statistics Division, data on living standards, own calculation.

ⁱⁱⁱ i.e. 11.5 millions square meters of office space, excluding suburban office parks and about 2 millions extra square meters of vacant surfaces (Brussels Capital Region, 2009)

^{iv} Brussels' regional policy-makers are largely powerless as far as the planning of the city's suburbs is concerned, for the boundaries of the Brussels Capital Region coincide with the extension of the core city (1 million inhabitants), and not with the extension of the metropolitan area. About 1.4 million inhabitants live in the rest of the metropolitan area outside the Region (i.e. in Flemish or Walloon Brabant), among whom many are daily middle-class commuters and city users.

^v The largest part of the Region's receipts is due to residents' income taxes, registration fees paid by homebuyers and succession fees.

^{vi} Albeit this report is about programmes implemented by municipalities using funds provided by the Belgian federal urban policy (hence not about policies implemented by the Brussels' regional government), its findings are instructive as far as Brussels' urban 'revitalisation' policies are concerned, for the goals and narratives of both policy frameworks are very similar. Actually, both policy frameworks have been designed under the patronage of the same politician (Mr. Charles Picqué), Minister-President of the Brussels Capital Region between 1989 and 1999 and since 2004, and Minister of the federal government in charge of urban policy between 1999 and 2003.

^{vii} see www.demainbruxelles.be (in French), www.brusselmorgen.be (in Dutch)

^{viii} These sentences have not been included in the official presentation of the IDP's 'road map', presented in January 2008.

^{ix} These conclusions were given a quite frosty reception by the Brussels' regional authorities. As the head of the regional government puts it in the press: '*The Court of Audit ... should better assess the legality of the procedures rather than talking politics by echoing the braying of some French sociologists*' (Le Soir, February 18, 2007 : 10). The quite aggressive and very much anti-intellectual tone of this comment gives an additional sense of the importance of social mix as a key element for the legitimization of urban revitalisation policies in Brussels, as well as at the federal level. Linking revitalisation policies and narratives of social mix to the advance of gentrification is very much of a taboo in Brussels.